MONASTICISM IN ENGLAND

DIBDIN

Lord Stuart of Wortley
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BEFORE THE REFORMATION

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A Lecture

BY

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NOTE.

This lecture is one of a course on English Church History, given in the parish in which I live. It has no claim to originality of research or novelty of view, and my only reason for printing it is that I have tried to bring within the compass of a few pages information upon a subject of current interest, which I have only succeeded in gaining by reference to a great many volumes.

L. T. D.

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MONASTICISM IN ENGLAND

BEFORE THE REFORMATION.

Eastern Monasticism

THE monk, like the gospel itself, came from the East. We hear of ascetics or hermits, solitary men, renowned for sanctity and austerity, living in caves and deserts, within two centuries of our Lord's death. Early in the fourth century Pachomius, an Egyptian ascetic, who impressed his cotemporaries by his gentleness and suavity, is said to have been the first to collect monks together in a community under fixed regulations. His society at Tabenna was visited by Athanasius, who is said to have introduced monasticism into the West, in the form of Pachomius's rule, about A.D. 340. But the West is very different from the East, and the

institution, though only transplanted, was greatly modified by its new soil.

Western Monasticism.

Eastern monasticism was dreamy and speculative. Simon Stylites living for thirty years at the top of a pillar 60 feet high, with his neck fettered by an iron collar, engaged in perpetual adoration, is the type of the Oriental ideal. In the West, monasticism became practical, the observance of precise rules was looked to, and the convent was the seat of extraordinary intellectual activity and daring inquiry. The root notion of monasticism, however, is the same all over the world. It is best stated in the words of Montalembert:*

"When we search in the monuments of history for the natural interpretation and human origin of monastic vocations we perceive that they were born, above all, of a conviction, often

* "The Monks of the West," i. 23.

precocious, but always profound and reasonable, of the vanity of human things, and of the constant defeat of virtue and truth upon earth."

I should like to say, in addition, that the object which monasticism had in view, its essential purpose, was the salvation and perfecting of the monk himself, not the improvement of the world. Thus the monk's labours were primarily for his own discipline, and any good they did to other people was accidental. The idea of making monasticism of service to society has grown up but very gradually. Practically unknown in the East, it was not recognised in the West until the time of the Cistercians, and very faintly by them. The Mendicant Orders really gave the first real prominence to the idea, which, however, has largely governed the post-Reformation Orders, or "Congregations" as they are called.

Early Opposition to Monasticism.

It has been said that "in the depths of human nature there exists a tendency, instinctive, though confused and evanescent, towards retirement and solitude."* Certainly monasticism spread in the fourth and fifth centuries. In Egypt alone there are said to have been 100,000 monks. Yet the acceptance of the new ideal was by no means universal. Chrysostom had condemned the notion that family life was inferior, and at the close of the fourth century Vigilantius, a man of great learning and character, after long experience of St. Jerome's monastery at Bethlehem, returned to his native Gaul and protested against the special virtue attributed to the unmarried state. He held that for the clergy to be married was an advantage to the Church, and he looked on the solitary life as a cowardly forsaking of

* "The Monks of the West," i. 20.

responsibility. St. Jerome published an answer which enjoys the distinction of being the most vituperative of even that father's works. According to tradition he sat up all night to write it, which may perhaps account for any unnecessary heat. But, however, Jerome won, the Church sided with the monks, and Jovinian, another protester, was condemned as a heretic.*

Fall of the Western Empire.

Europe was in an extraordinary and chaotic condition in the middle of the fifth century. In 476 the Empire of the West, long crumbling to decay, subsided at the will of Odoacer, a barbarian adventurer from the North. The first Emperor of Rome was Augustus, the last was fitly named Augustulus. "Thus," says Dean Church, "it had become clear that the foundation of human life and society, which had seemed under the first Emperors eternal,

* Jovinian's views were objected to in other respects.

had given way. The Roman Empire was not the 'last word' in the history of the world; but either the world was in danger of falling into chaos, or else new forms of life were yet to appear."*

There was indeed danger of chaos. Everywhere there was internal violence and foreign invasion. Barbarian heathenism was treading upon and mastering an emasculated civilisation. In England, Hengist and Horsa with their Saxons swept the Romanised Britons almost off the face of the earth and restored paganism. On the Continent wave after wave of barbarian inroad swept over Gaul and Germany and Italy. It was an awful time for Christian men and women. Society was corrupt. There was neither virtue, nor courage, nor capacity amongst the old races who professed Christianity. The whole foundations of

* "Preparation for the Middle Ages," p. 27.

government and all the traditions of politics were upset, and on top of it all the enemies of God, hated and ignorant barbarians, were conquering the land and treating the most sacred persons and places with contempt.

St. Benedict.

It was at this crisis of the world's history that the man who is generally admitted to have been the virtual founder of Western Monasticism came on the scene. Born in 480, within a few years of the fall of the Empire, at Nursia in Italy, Benedict was the son of well-to-do parents. But according to tradition, he had a passion for ascetic seclusion from childhood. Taken to Rome for education, he fled from the frivolity of the Eternal City in company with his nurse, with whom he took refuge in mountain fastnesses. Later he lived by himself in a cave at Subiaco, until his retreat was discovered. A priest who lived near had a

kind of revelation which bid him, one Easter Sunday, put the good dinner he had prepared for himself into a basket and let it down over the cliffs at a certain point. He obeyed, and to his astonishment found Benedict ready to enjoy the descending and unexpected feast. The neighbourhood became populous with spectators and imitators. The monks of a neighbouring monastery insisted, sorely against the wish of Benedict, on making him their prior. He warned them that he could not sanction their loosened discipline and lack of zeal. They thought they could obey such a leader, but before long they were so filled with exasperation that they put poison in the sacramental chalice to destroy him; but the chalice burst in pieces in his hand. The devil was equally hostile, and in the form of a raven flapped his wings in Benedict's face so as almost

to blind him. Disheartened by these unfavourable demonstrations, he left the monastery and finally settled at Monte Casino, where, gathering disciples around him, he took possession of a ruined temple of Apollo and built his famous convent, the nursery of the Benedictine Order. Here, too, he had difficulties, for, incited by the devil, the stones refused to be moved into their places except under the influence of Benedict's prayers.

The Benedictine Rule.

In 529 St. Benedict published his "rule" or system of regulations for his monks. When we remember that it has lasted for 1400 years, and has been the model of the religious orders all over the world from that day to this, we may assume that it was no ordinary work. His personal influence with cotemporaries gave it the necessary start, but inherent power and fitness kept it in vigorous life. Let me say a word here

as to St. Benedict's personal influence. I have touched upon one or two out of the legion of miraculous incidents which fill his history. To omit them would be to give a very untrue impression. The fact is, in that age of ignorance and anarchy no man could influence deeply the public mind who did not excite enthusiasm. The surest way to do that was to surround himself with wonder and mystery. Miracle was then the diploma of sanctity. I neither mean that Benedict shammed, or that his followers lied, but I do mean that unless a belief had arisen in his wonder-working powers his Rule would never have been accepted. Honoured and reverenced by all, St. Benedict died in 543. Within a few years of his death, his monastery of Monte Casino was wrecked in the convulsions of the fall of the Gothic Monarchy and the reconquest of Italy by the Eastern Emperor.

The Discipline.

The Benedictine discipline aimed to promote the growth of three virtues:

Industry as opposed to Indolence,

Obedience as opposed to self-will,

Community of goods as opposed to selfishness.

In this work it relied on three rules:

The rule of silence,

The rule of humility,

The rule of obedience.

Three occupations formed the work of the Benedictine monk:

1. The worship of God.

Service in the Church daily at the canonical hours was maintained. At a later date these were

12 midnight ... Matins and Lauds, the longest service in the day.

6 A.M. ... Prime.

9 A.M. ... Terce.

12 midday ... Sext.
3 P.M. ... None.
6 P.M. ... Vespers.
9 P.M. ... Compline.

As the cult of the Virgin and of the Saints increased, these services were both added to and modified.

2. Reading and writing.

There was an absence of the severe, almost inhuman austerities of the earlier monks. St. Benedict assigned eminent rank amongst monastic virtues to the guardianship and multiplication of valuable MSS. The libraries of the order were world-renowned, and it has always, down to the present day, been distinguished as pre-eminent in literary achievements. The Venerable Bede and Charlemagne's friend and historian Alcuin were both English Benedictines.

3. Manual labour.

Agriculture, the tilling of the ground, was adopted, and wisely adopted, as providing work for the monks which was at once humbling, useful, and healthful. The enormous service which the monks conferred upon the world by their agricultural labour cannot be exaggerated. Yet it is doubtful whether St. Benedict ever looked beyond the spiritual and moral discipline of individual monks.

Vows.

Every monk took the three vows of (1) poverty, (2) chastity, (3) obedience. It may be well to say here once for all what has to be said about vows. The early history of them in connection with monasticism is obscure, but from the stage we have reached until the present time there have been two distinct sorts of vows, viz., "solemn" and "simple"—*i.e.*, the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience

might be taken either as solemn or as simple vows. Solemn vows are lifelong, and are only dispensed by the Pope himself for defined and exceptional reasons. Until the Reformation monastic vows were usually solemn. Simple vows, on the other hand, may always be dispensed by the Pope, and, in any order which is under merely episcopal control, by the Bishop. Since the Reformation simple vows have been usual, and Pius IX. forbade the taking of solemn vows in any new order.

Poverty.

The Benedictine monks could neither retain nor acquire property in their own persons. All property vested in and belonged to the community.

Dress.

The Benedictine dress is a black habit, a black scapular (or strip of cloth, broad or narrow, hanging down from the neck in front and sometimes also down the back), a black cowl, and a leathern belt.

A Monk's Day.

The monastic life varied in different houses. The following is a summary of a day at the Benedictine Abbey at Durham, condensed from the account of an eye-witness just before the suppression. At midnight a few strokes on the bell roused the monk from sleep, and he took his stand ready clothed at the door of his cell and fell into his place in the procession as it moved slowly up the dimly lit dormitory corridor and down the stairs into the south transept of the church. Matins were sung in the choir at midnight (or not later than 2 A.M.), lasting two hours. A short rest followed, but the community met again for Prime at 5 A.M., after which the daily Chapter sat. Faults were corrected, encouragement given, the labours of the community apportioned, and matters of common interest discussed. At the stroke of 6 the short Chapter Mass was celebrated,

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and after this study or exercise occupied the monks till 8 A.M. Then the great bell of the Abbey summoned them to the choir for High Mass, lasting till 10. The meal of the day followed in the refectory. During the meal the Bible was read from the pulpit. After dinner was finished the monks used to walk through the cloister into the centre garth, where all the monks were buried, and to stand there bareheaded amongst the tombs praying for the dead brethren's souls. Then they returned to the cloister and studied their books till 3 P.M., when they went to church to chant vespers. After this the monks went back to the cloister till the tolling of the bell announced the evening meal. The sub-prior presided. The supper was over by 5 P.M., and after grace they went to the chapter house to meet the prior and to remain there in prayer and

devotion till 6, when the bell summoned them to church for Compline. This lasted an hour, and then after a brief space devoted to private prayer all retired to the dormitory till "the bells which rung ever at midnight—for the monks went ever more to their matins at that hour of night," proclaimed with the new day another round of prayer and labour.*

Gregory the Great.

We have reached the close of the sixth century. The Church had been gaining in power, but in purity and spirituality there had been a great decay since the fourth century. But in 590 a great event happened. "Monasticism ascended the Papal throne in the person of Gregory the Great."† He was a Roman of senatorial family, a monk of the sternest discipline,

* Gasquet's "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries," i. 20.

† Milman's "Latin Christianity," Book III. ch. vii.

a devout and rather dreamy Christian, to whom and in whose neighbourhood miracles were almost commonplace in their frequency, and yet for all that a man of grasp for affairs and sagacity in counsel. Obviously he was made for the age, and in a time of plague and war Gregory was summoned to the chair of St. Peter. His life marks a great epoch. The Papacy as distinct from an undefined Primacy of Rome begins with him. He was a great organiser, and also a great reformer. For this latter purpose he used the Benedictines very largely. It was he who sent Augustine and his forty monks to Kent. The Augustinian Mission was the first introduction amongst us of the Benedictine rule (though apparently in a modified form). It was not the first that had been seen of monks in England. Celtic monasticism had much to do with the earlier conversion of

Britain, and again with its recovery after the failure of the Augustinian Mission, and the deaths of Paulinus and Archbishop Honorius, the last survivor of the band. Lindisfarne and Iona, and the Missionaries Columba, Aidan, Finan, Colman, Cuthbert, Cedd and Chad all belong to a separate type of monasticism, probably brought directly from the East in very early times. But so little is known of Celtic monasticism that it is useless to dwell upon it. Apparently it so influenced the English monasteries which grew up plentifully during the seventh and eighth centuries as to seriously modify the Benedictine rule.

Saxon England

The time was one of civil war in England. The petty kings of the Heptarchy, some Christian, some pagan, were constantly in conflict, and so there was an ebb and flow of Christianity according as the old religion or the new for the moment succeeded. On the con-

tinent the Moslem cloud was growing darker and more threatening. About 630 the Saracens began to attack the Eastern Empire under Heraclius, and 80 years later the Saracens and Moors took Spain. Central Europe was saved (732) by Charles Martel's crushing victory over the Arabs near Tours; and so the way was paved for the empire of his grandson Charlemagne, who, towering head and shoulders above all his cotemporaries, stands at the beginning of the ninth century, the sign and the emblem of a new start in history. Social order was established. Laws were just, and were enforced. Education was State-supported. A large part of North Europe was still pagan, but missionaries, nearly all Benedictines, and many English Benedictines, were at work, and partly by their efforts and partly by the compulsion of the conqueror heathenism was receding. The monks were

just the people for missionaries. They were simple men who did not know the world, and so found "all things possible to him that believed." Thus Boniface (or Winfred, to give him his English name), a Devonshire man, and a monk from a Benedictine Abbey near Winchester after rising to be Archbishop of Mainz, resigned his see and became a simple monk again that he might preach the Gospel to the heathen Frieslanders. He was martyred by them (755), and a copy of St. Ambrose's "De Bono Mortis," stained with his blood, was long preserved as a relic at Fulda.

Decay of Religious Houses.

But despite the devotion of individuals, the eighth and ninth centuries were a period of decay in the religious houses. In England we read that riot and drinking had become common. It was the same throughout Europe. In the middle of the eighth century a second

Benedict strove hard to effect a reform, but his restrictions were too slight and petty, and the decay went on. Hitherto the monks had been almost always unordained, but now it became common to give them orders. The original purpose was to help the monks in their missionary work, by enabling them to administer the sacraments. But the result was to make them eligible for bishoprics and other ecclesiastical positions of wealth. Contact with the world became inevitable, and there was a notable decline from the old simplicity. The monasteries were filled with Benedictine canons, who were clergy without any pretence of poverty. The evil was greatly augmented by a custom called the "Commendam," by which Princes and later Popes claimed to give away, sometimes to dissolute soldiers, sometimes to young children, and generally to absentees, the office and emoluments of abbot. The scandals which resulted were inconceivable—one man would hold scores of benefices—and Montalembert thinks this abuse largely responsible for the failure of the system.

The Cluniacs.

Things were in this evil plight when in England the first great invasion of the Danes (867) swept over the country and wrecked everything, including the monasteries. When the monks began to get together again, after the storm, their libraries, their buildings, and their best men were gone. It is not surprising that the next half century saw monasticism sink still lower. It touched its lowest point both here and in Europe in the 10th century. "In 942," Bishop Stubbs says, "there were no real Benedictines in England." But then came the first great revival. In 927 St. Odo of Tours and Berno, the first abbot of Cluny, started what is called the Cluniac rule.

It was merely a stricter form of the Benedictine rule, but it had a marvellous effect. Fasting and silence were more rigidly insisted on. Manual labour was excused, but study was required instead. The dress of the monks was not changed. There was an increase of liturgical splendour in the services. The great peculiarity of the Cluniac constitution was that all monasteries founded under its rule, wherever situate, were subject to the Abbey of Cluny. The new order grew quickly in numbers and power. In the twelfth century there were 2,000 Cluniac houses in Europe. The Abbey church was the largest in Europe until St. Peter's at Rome was consecrated. The Cluniacs reformed not only the monasteries but the Papacy itself. It had sunk very low.

Sir James Stephen on the Papacy]

Sir James Stephen writes:

"Except in the annals of Eastern despotisms

no parallel can be found for the disasters of the Papacy during the century and a half which followed the extinction of the Carlovingian dynasty. Of the 24 Popes who during that period ascended the apostolic throne, two were murdered, five were driven into exile, four were deposed, and three resigned their hazardous dignity. Some of these Vicars of Christ were raised to that awful pre-eminence by arms and some by money. Two received it from the hands of courtly courtesans; one was self-appointed. A well-filled purse purchased one papal abdication, a promise of a fair bride another. One of these holy fathers pillaged the treasury, fled with the spoil, returned to Rome, ejected his substitute, and mutilated him in a manner too revolting for description. . . . Crime and debauchery held revel in the Vatican." *

* "Stephen's Ecclesiastical Essays," i. 2.

Gregory VII.

Hildebrand (Gregory VII., 1073) Prior of Cluny, was the greatest of many Cluniac Popes. I need not remind you that his reign marks an epoch in Church History. His influence told in two ways. He immensely increased the Papal power, and he sternly repressed ecclesiastical abuses, especially simony. The intimate connection between Cluny and the Papacy made the Cluniacs at once the most privileged and the most devoted servants of the Pope. The exemptions from Episcopal visitation, which became a great source of trouble and evil, began about this time, and although it is outside the scope of this lecture to deal with that aspect of the subject, the Orders, and the Cluniacs especially, will always be found zealous propagandists of Papal views, often in advance of the authorised teaching of their Church.

St. Dunstan.

The Cluniac reform extended through

Fleury on the Loire to England and is the real explanation of St. Dunstan's work (925–988), although the foundation of a professedly Cluniac house was not till 1077. Nephew of an Archbishop of Canterbury, brought up at the Court of Athelstan and Abbot of Glastonbury, Dunstan became Edgar's Archbishop and adviser. He was a great reformer. The lax Benedictine canons were turned out and for the first time in England the Benedictine rule was strictly enforced. The second Danish invasion (980) was not nearly so destructive to the monasteries as the first. But it is difficul to tell how far St. Dunstan's efforts were really successful or how far their results were temporary only. At the time of the Conquest, two generations later, there can be no doubt that William's Norman prelates from the Benedictine houses at Bec and Caen had plenty of real abuses to

complain of, besides our insular unwillingness to give in to Papal assumption.

Decay of the Cluniacs.

We are now standing at the end of the eleventh century. The monasteries were in a sad state of decay. Even the Cluniacs had left their first love. They became the least ascetic of the Benedictines. As I have said, the system was strictly monarchical: the Abbot of Cluny was supreme over all Cluniac houses throughout the world. There had been bad abbots with the inevitable results of loosened discipline and confusion. The Orders were fighting for immunity from episcopal control, and that often meant licence to throw off all control. Although the worst scandals of the Papacy were over and the Popes, chosen under German influence, were at any rate respectable, their influence for good in Christendom was not at all in proportion to their pretensions.

The first Crusade.

Almost suddenly came the shock of the first crusade. The Saracens, whom we heard of last in the eighth century just beginning to give trouble, were now a very serious cause of anxiety. They had, in fact, held Syria since the seventh century, but there was a numerous Christian population, and pilgrims were not molested. Now the Moslem not only ruled in the Holy City, but he ill-treated and despoiled the Christians, and worse than all he had destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. When the news came to Europe it created an electric thrill everywhere. The Pope, Urban II., proclaimed a sacred war (1096) to rescue the holy places from the infidel, and a cry went up, which became the general watchword, "*Dieu le veult.*" For nearly a generation the chivalry of Europe flocked to the East.

The Truce of God.

The proclamation of the crusade had two

immediate results which concern our subject. A great wave of religious enthusiasm and activity was aroused, in sharp contrast to the deadness of the prior age: that was one result. The other was that war abroad made peace at home. One of the worst evils of the middle ages was the right of every local count or knight to wage "private war" as it was called with his neighbours. During the crusade the Pope proclaimed a general peace, "the truce of God," and the absence of most of the possible combatants was the best guarantee of its being kept. Thus we have Europe at peace and a general stir of religious enthusiasm. As usual the time produced the man. It was St. Bernard the great Cistercian.

The Carthusians.

Just before the first crusade in 1084 a new order, the Carthusians, was founded by Bruno, a monk of Cologne, at La Grande Chartreuse,

near Grenoble, in France. The monks had each their own living and sleeping cell, with a church and refectory for use in common. The Charter House in London (1371) belonged to this order, but the earliest English house was at Witham, Somerset (1180). There were but eight other Carthusian houses amongst us at the Reformation. The rule is very strict—nearly perpetual silence. The monks wore a white habit and broad white scapular before and behind. But St. Bernard's order of Cistercians was destined to play a far more important part in history. It was founded in 1098, not by St. Bernard, who was then a boy, but by Robert de Molesme and Stephen Hardinge, a Dorsetshire man and a monk of Sherborne. Again the idea was reform by a more steady adherence to the Benedictine rule. Their abbey, consisting of a few huts, was at Citeaux, near Dijon. St.

The Cistercians.

St. Bernard.

Bernard came of a knightly family, and his father's castle was near Citeaux. From a devout mother Bernard received strong religious impressions, and at an early age he sought admission (with 30 companions) at Citeaux, just as the community seemed likely to collapse for want of novices, for the severe simplicity of the abbey was not attractive. In due time he was sent thence with twelve other monks to form a fresh monastic colony at Clairvaux, and he remained abbot of the house he there founded all the rest of his life. Austere in life—his voluntary privations early destroyed his health and very nearly cut short his career—Bernard had the breadth of intellect, the power of eloquence, the strength of character, and the profound unselfishness necessary to influence the world. He is known as "the last of the Fathers." For thirty years he was by far the most potent personage

in Europe. When two Popes disputed for supremacy, St. Bernard was called in to decide. When Abelard, the keen rationalist of the twelfth century, was to be confuted, St. Bernard was chosen for the task. When civil war broke out and cities were a prey to bloodshed, St. Bernard was called in to make peace. When whole countries were given up to heresy, St. Bernard was summoned to preach to the people and the schism was healed. When a new crusade was to be proclaimed, St. Bernard's must be the voice to stir the people and inspire their confidence.

St. Bernard's simplicity.

His work as a religious reformer was vast and most salutary. It was not merely discipline, but piety which his example and his teaching revived. He has often been called the Puritan of Monasticism. In contrast to the Cluniacs, he insisted on the most severe simplicity in his churches and monasteries No

carving, no rich hangings, no gold and silver plate (except one silver chalice), and no architectural display were permitted. Listen to his words:*

"To speak plainly, is it not avarice which does all this? By the sight of wonderful and costly vanities, men are prompted to give rather than to pray . . . what do you suppose is the object of all this? to promote the penitence of the contrite or the admiration of beholders . . . Again, on the walls of the cloisters where the brethren read, what place have those absurd monsters, those odd and beautiful deformities?"

Cistercian Neglect of Canon Law.

He insisted (though this was disregarded after his death) on submission to the Bishops. The study of Civil and Canon Law, which from its capability for being turned to financial profit became a snare to the Orders, was forbidden,

* "St. Bernard," S.P.C.K., by S. J. Eales, p. 201.

and Cistercian libraries are to this day devoid of law books.

Luther on St. Bernard.

I wish there were time to dwell longer on St. Bernard's personal history. A whole course of lectures might easily be devoted to his extraordinary life, his preaching, his journeys, and the miracles that, as his cotemporaries believed, attended his work. He died in 1153 utterly worn out by illness, induced by austerity and by ceaseless labours. The slight, almost gaunt form, the ascetic face, the clear blue eye, penetrating and yet tender, and, above all, the trumpet voice which could command a multitude or melt a penitent, they all stand out for us in history, as real and striking now as in the twelfth century. Though time is precious, I must quote Luther's words:

"Thus did Bernard, a man so godly, so holy and so chaste that he is to be commended and

preferred before all the fathers. He being grievously sick, and having no hope of life, put not his trust in his single life, in which he had yet lived most chastely; nor in his good works or deeds of charity, whereof he had done many; but removing them far out of his sight, and receiving the benefit of Christ by faith, he said: 'I have live wickedly, but Thou, Lord Jesus, dost possess the Kingdom of Heaven by double right; first, because Thou art the Son of God; secondly, because Thou has purchased it by Thy death and passion. The first, Thou keepest for Thyself as Thy birthright; the second, Thou givest to me, not by the right of my works, but by the right of grace.'

"He set not against the wrath of God his monastic state, nor his angelic life; but he took of that one thing that was necessary, and so was saved."*

* "St. Bernard," S.P.C.K., p. 257.

Cistercian Houses.

The Cistercian houses were governed on the republican principle. A grand chapter of all the Abbots of the different monasteries met from time to time at Citeaux, and this chapter governed the order. Waverley, in Surrey, was the first house established in England (1128). The Cistercians spread with astonishing rapidity. The crusade prepared the ground, and St. Bernard was an excellent planter. By the middle of the thirteenth century there were 60,000 monks of this order. At the Reformation there were 104 houses in England. Most of our beautiful abbey ruins are Cistercian, for his followers soon forgot St. Bernard's simplicity and disapproval of gurgoyles. Fountains, Rievaulx, Kirkstall, Byland, Tintern, Netley, and Beaulieu are all of this order.

Dress.

The monks wear a white habit and black scapular.

Monastic Luxury.

The influence of St. Bernard extended far beyond his own order. But the reform was partial and evanescent. Giraldus Cambrensis gives a striking picture of the state of things on his visit to St. Augustine's, Canterbury, in 1180:

"He was hospitably entertained, but his astonishment at what he witnessed was intense. The conversation and manners of the monks he affirms were such that he thought himself amongst players and jesters. The table at dinner was regularly laid with sixteen covers. Fish and flesh, roast and boiled, highly seasoned dishes, piquant sauces and exquisite cookery stimulated the flagging appetite. Though the ale of Kent was of the best, it was rarely tasted when claret, mead, and mulberry wine were constantly flowing." *

* Mullinger's "Cambridge," i. 86.

Decline.

Mr. Eales, speaking of the Cistercians, says:*

"Much of this strictness was, however, relaxed speedily after the death of St. Bernard, and in no country was the declension more manifest than in England. Although pledged by their rule to be a standing protest against any kind of wealth or luxury, they had yet become, before the order had been a hundred years domiciled in England, the richest and most powerful of all the monastic orders."

Augustin an Canon.

The same period of revival which saw the rise of the Cistercians marks the beginning of other orders. Rather earlier indeed (1061) the Augustinian canons started in an attempt to reduce the cathedral clergy to order. The secular canons, who hitherto had lived easy lives, resented

* "St. Bernard," S.P.C.K., by S. J. Eales, p. 67.

They wore a white habit with a red and blue cross. The military orders (*e.g.* the Templars) whose history time prevents my dwelling on, were the direct outcome of the crusades. They followed the Augustinian rule.

The Results of the Crusades.

We have come now to the opening of the thirteenth century. Again we are at a critical point of the history of Europe. The crusades had done their work. They accomplished three things for the West which should be clearly perceived. They multiplied a hundredfold the trade of Europe, by promoting first the taste, and then the means, of travel, and by indirectly causing the abolition of private war. Traders and manufacturers, each in their own calling, began to band together in Guilds for business, for society, and for charity. The guild spirit was spreading everywhere, and the power of the system, which showed towards Church and State

alike a remarkable independence, was a new revelation to Kings and Popes. This was the first result of the crusades.

Power of the East on the West.

Secondly, the tastes, the literature, the vices, and the irreligion of the East were freely imported into the West. The Crusaders went to convert the Saracens, and they were half converted themselves. The East, with its far longer history and greater experience, was intellectually stronger than the West. The simple people were falling before the more cultivated and subtle. The Church looked on aghast at the growth of freedom of thought which the townsmen, strong in their new associations, were fearlessly asserting. Manichæism, which asserted the essential evil of matter, and represented God as a good spirit in conflict with an independent principle of evil which was supreme in matter, was a popular and spread-

the notion of either poverty, obedience, or celibacy. In England the conquest marks the epoch of the struggle. The Augustinian rule, supposed to be that laid down by St. Augustine of Hippo for the clergy who lived in his house, was attempted to be introduced. It was a modified monastic plan, under which separate endowments belonged to each canonry, but celibacy was enforced. It was not accepted in any of the cathedrals, but a different sort of arrangement was made. Canterbury, Winchester, Durham, Coventry, Norwich, Rochester, Worcester, Ely, and Bath became monastic pure and simple; while York, London, Exeter, Lichfield, Wells, Hereford, Lincoln, Salisbury, and Chichester remained in the possession of secular canons. But while Carlisle (founded later by Henry I.) was the only cathedral which professed the Augustinian rule, the order flourished

exceedingly in other directions. St. Saviour's Southwark, Waltham, and Bolton belonged to it; at the Reformation there were 196 Augustinian houses (counting nunneries). The canon's dress was a cassock and rochet, a black cloak and biretta. In 1120 the Premonstratensian canons, clergy practising a strict form of the Augustinian rule, took their beginning from St. Norbert. They had 35 houses in England at the Reformation. The dress was a black habit and white cloak. A few years after the Gilbertine order of canons, started by St. Gilbert of Sempringham, was founded. They had 28 houses in England at the Reformation, and the dress was a black cassock and white cloak. The order is interesting as being of purely English growth. In 1167 the Crutched (or Crossed) friars, also called Trinitarians, were started. Their chief duty was to redeem Christian captives from the Moors.

ing creed. This was the second result of the Crusades.

Leprosy.

Thirdly, the Crusaders brought back with them the awful disease of leprosy, which spread with terrible rapidity in every country of Europe. The wretched sanitary condition of the towns helped it. We talk now of the division of classes, but it is difficult even to conceive the state of things in the middle ages. The nobility and gentry all lived in the country. The great monasteries were in the country. The towns were roughly divided into two parts. In the upper part were the church, the guildhall, the market, and the houses of the merchants and tradesmen. Down below, probably on the marshy banks of a river (the neighbourhood of which had made the spot attractive to the first settlers centuries before) outside the city walls, and receiving the drainage from the upper town,

the unguilded masses, the despised poor, uncared for by the Church, unprotected by the State, their ranks continually swelled by fresh fugitives from feudal tyranny, herded together as best they could. Imagine what the free introduction of leprosy in such a seed-bed of disease must have been!

St. Francis.

Once again the age and the man came together. St. Francis was born at Assisi in Umbria in 1182. His father was a thriving merchant of the town, and in his youth and early manhood Francis was just a typical Italian, gay, gallant, ardent, popular, a man of action and not of study. While still a young man he was converted, and, in the language of the day, took Poverty to be his bride. "If ye will be perfect, go and sell all that ye have." "Take nothing for your journey." "He that would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and

follow Me." These were the orders he conceived himself to have received direct from Christ. The rule of St. Francis was special. The poverty was to be absolute. Unlike all earlier communities, even the order was not to possess property. The members were to beg their daily bread. Lastly, and this is the most important point, the purpose of the order was to be the good of others rather than the edification of the individual monk. The Franciscans were to be poor men, living amongst the poor, and as the poor, and for the poor, and especially for the lepers. They stepped into a practically unoccupied field. At last the masses had found a friend. Their manner of life is graphically painted by Mr. Brewer as follows: "Their meals corresponded with the poverty of their buildings. Mendicancy might encourage idleness, but it also secured effectually the mean and meagre

diet of the friars. It kept them on a par with the masses, among whom their founder intended them to labour. They could not sell their offerings, they were not permitted to receive more than their actual necessities required—meal, salt, figs and apples, wood for firing, stale beer or milk. Whatever the weather, however rough the way, they threaded the muddy streets and unpaved roads barefooted and bareheaded, leaving the prints of their bleeding feet upon the ground, in gowns of the coarsest cloth, which an economical vestryman of this nineteenth century would be ashamed to offer to the most refractory pauper in a parish workhouse. St. Francis had provided carefully for the poverty of his order. If the Gospel net, woven out of purple and fine linen, had hitherto rather scared than caught the fish it was intended to enclose, the founder of the mendicant orders took care that it should

be as coarse and home-spun as poverty itself could make it." *

Start of the Friars.

Followers were soon attracted by so inspiring and so novel a mission. They came to his hut near the *Rivo Torto*, in Italy, and asked what they should do. St. Francis scratched a cross on the ground, pointing North, South, East, and West. He arranged his disciples in four rows along each limb of the cross and he told them to go out into all the world. How thoroughly they obeyed their leader's command their rapid progress in every direction soon testified. In 1215 we find him a suppliant, and at first a neglected suppliant, to Innocent III. (the Pope who humbled our King John) for Papal sanction to the new order. Reflection showed the sagacious Pontiff that the ardent young zealot before him had hit upon a way to meet the

* Brewer's "Monumenta Franciscana," Pref. xix.

new difficulty of the infidelity and the wretchedness of the masses, which had baffled all his skill and statecraft. Though he had conquered the Kings and aristocracy of Europe and had turned into stern reality Hildebrand's awful conception of the Papacy, the solution of the rising social problem was beyond him.

The *Stigmata*.

I cannot stop to speak further of St. Francis's own life. It was passed in a whirl of work and in an atmosphere of miracle. He is said to have received the "*stigmata*"—*i.e.*, wounds in his body similar to those which our Lord received on the Cross from the nails and the spear. I shall content myself with quoting Archbishop Trench's observations on this matter: *

"Let a word or two here find place on these marks or wounds, these '*stigmata*' in his hands, his feet, his side, to which they thus

* Trench's "Lectures on Medieval Church History," p. 236.

appealed. Assuming their existence as sufficiently proved by cotemporary evidence, I can only reject the explanation which sees in them special marks of Divine favour, imprinted on his body to bring him into closer conformity with his crucified Lord; while, on the other hand, I dismiss with scorn the suggestion that they were marks artificially and fraudfully brought about by the Saint himself, for his own greater glorification, with or without the assistance or connivance of others. There is no *à priori* ground for refusing credit to the statements of those who testified that they had seen these wound-prints and handled them. A like phenomenon has since repeated itself so often, there have been so many analogous cases verified beyond all doubt, some eighty at least, by no means all in the Roman Catholic Church, that it is idle to urge a physical impossibility. The matter, after all,

is not so unintelligible. We know something now of the reactive power of the spirit, which is the stronger, in moulding and fashioning the flesh, which is the weaker,—enough to bring all which here looks so inexplicable within the sphere of things natural. Figure to yourselves a man with a temperament so impressible, of an organisation so delicate, penetrated through and through with the anguish of his Lord's sufferings, passionately and continually dwelling on all the circumstances of the crucifixion, yearning, so to speak, to be crucified with Him. For myself, when I do so, I can quite understand how all this uttered itself in these visible tokens, and I am sure that there was no miracle, as I am that there was no fraud."

The Franciscans.

The Franciscans or Minorites or Grey Friars (they wore a grey habit with a knotted cord round the waist) were at first fervent

rather than learned. In protest against the tendencies of the times they dwelt on the human side and human relationships of our Lord. His sufferings, His childhood, and His Mother were prominent in Franciscan preaching. It was a welcome contrast to the dry dogmas and unintelligible refinements of the older clergy. No wonder they spread. But as time went on the friars felt the need of knowledge to deal alike with the physical and the moral diseases of the people. Despite the positive directions of their founder against books and pens and ink, they became successful students of medicine and natural philosophy. Our Roger Bacon, "the wonderful doctor," who invented gunpowder, was a Franciscan Friar.

Growth of the Order.

The growth of the order was prodigious. The second general chapter, held in 1219, was

attended by 5,000 friars; within twenty-two years after St. Francis's death there are said to have been 8,000 houses belonging to his order. The Franciscans were governed by a General in Rome and a Provincial for each country where they settled. The friars were established in England in 1226, two years before St. Francis's death. At the Reformation there were sixty-six houses in England.

Decline.

Neither the ardour nor the austerity of the order lasted long. The rule of poverty gave way first. It was held that although neither the friars nor their community could hold property, the Pope might hold it for them, and allow them the income of it. Thus large endowments passed into their hands, and at the Reformation the Corporation of London was a trustee for the Franciscans to a considerable extent. An attempt to recur to the

primitive strictness of the order was made about 1400, which led to a division into two separate bodies—the Observants, who were the reforming party; and the Conventuals, who favoured the relaxed stringency of the rule.

Supplanting the Parochial Clergy.

At first the friars were not clergy, but they soon began to take orders, and then obtained leave from the Pope to baptize, marry, bury, and hear confessions everywhere without the leave of the parochial clergy. They were also free from episcopal supervision. This became a frightful source of scandal. It was convenient to confess sin and obtain absolution from a friar, who was here to-day and gone to-morrow, rather than from the parish priest, who knew the penitent's life and was a near neighbour. Bonaventura, General of the Franciscans, admitted that the mendicant system worked nothing but mischief within fifty years of St. Francis's

death. They became "importunate beggars," "idle legacy-hunters," "undesirable friends." They built costly houses, and, to crown all, Franciscans who insisted on St. Francis's rule of absolute poverty were burnt by other Franciscans for heretics.*

St. Dominic.

In the very year when St. Francis obtained papal sanction for his order, another order of friars received the like sanction. St. Dominic, a Spaniard of Old Castile, was a very different man from St. Francis. He is described as "good to his friends, but dreadful to his foes." He is memorable as the author of the most popular of all Roman Catholic devotions, the Rosary. The primary purpose of his friars—the Dominicans—was to preach against and to repress heresy, and to win men back to the Church.

* I ought to add that many of the Fraticelli were wild anti-social heretics.

Apparently it was the spectacle of the Albigenses, then in open revolt, which suggested the need of some fresh effort. It is not known whether he approved the cruelties of the Albigensian war, of which he was a witness. He spent most of his life at Rome organising his order. The Dominicans followed the Augustinian rule with mendicancy added. They were devoted to preaching, and, in contrast to the Franciscans, were intellectual rather than spiritual. Their order furnished most of the great theologians of the Middle Ages. They dressed within the cloister in a white robe with white hood, but outside they wore a black cloak, hence "Black Friars." Their special work was the repression of heresy. In after years the Inquisition was under their management. The order was introduced into England in 1221 (the year of St. Dominic's death) by Archbishop

Langton. They were never popular here, although at the Reformation there were fifty Dominican houses.

The Carmelites.

There is yet another order of friars which must be mentioned. In 1171 the Carmelites probably started, but, if we believe their own story, Elijah founded the order on Mount Carmel. They laboured incessantly with their hands. They were imported into England by the Crusaders, and planted their first house at Alnwick. Their first European Chapter was held at Aylesford in 1245. The Carmelites, or White Friars, wore first a white cape and scapular, but afterwards a brown habit.

Wealth of the Religious Houses.

The general and unmistakable decay of the monasteries dates from the beginning of the fourteenth century. They had acquired enormous wealth. Parochial endowments had been largely diverted to their use under the

guise of "appropriations or consecrations"—*i.e.*, special gifts by laymen of tithes or lands or benefices to monasteries. The tithes thus given would otherwise under the common or customary law have gone to the priest of the parish where they arose. The benefices given by patrons to religious houses were the origin of vicarages. The monasteries kept the rectorial endowments and put in an ill-paid priest or vicar to perform the services. At the Reformation all these tithes and rectories went to the Crown, and from it passed into lay hands, by which they are still for the most part held. This absorption of parochial endowments by the monasteries was one of the main causes of the ever-recurring conflict between Seculars and Regulars. The monasteries had escaped to a very large extent the check of episcopal supervision. The reverence for relics and the erection of shrines was proving a

dangerously lucrative business. Money passed into the coffers of the monks, to be used in a competition of stately building and in even more doubtful ways. The practice of "Commendam" already referred to was a further source of terrible weakness, which of course the monks themselves were powerless to remedy. Forced Vocations—*i.e.*, the compulsion of persons to take monastic vows unwillingly, are admitted by Montalembert to have created serious scandal. The "able beggary" of the friars so furiously denounced by Wickliffe and his Lollards was perhaps the worst of all the evils of the system.

Montalembert on the Decay of Monasticism.

The fact of the absolute and irretrievable decay of the orders is nowhere stated more strongly than in Montalembert's great work, already so often quoted:

"Is it needful to ascertain further the depth of their fall, or to explain the true cause of their

ruin? . . . How did the Church allow herself to be consumed by that lamentable decay? Why did she not intervene with her Divine authority to save the precious portion of her inheritance?

". . . How shall we explain that all of them (the Bishops) have left that purulent plague to eat deeper and deeper until the day of immediate ruin? To this formidable question there is, however, one answer. The reform of the religious orders is scarcely more in the power of the Church than their foundation. . . . To found a religious order, there are required men specially raised and destined by God to that work, a Benedict, a Francis, a Dominic, an Ignatius . . . and could it be otherwise with reform, which is perhaps still more difficult than foundation? Men were then required, and none were to be found. God had not given them,

and the Church could not create them. Some appeared from time to time, but not enough for a grand, general, and definitive reform. Such was the reason why the religious orders were not reformed. . . .

"The evil continued and increased, till at last it exhausted the patience of God Himself. 'Divine Justice,' says Bossuet, 'avenges excesses by other excesses.' That which the Church left undone was done by the crime of the world."*

The Sixteenth Century.

Things did not mend. The Wars of the Roses loosened discipline, took the tenants of the Abbey farms off the land, making them unproductive and driving the monks into debt. The world seemed to have outgrown monasticism. No St. Bernard or St. Francis arose to put things right and make a new start. Nothing

* "Monks of the West," vol. i. pp. 149, 155, 156.

is more certain than that the sixteenth century found the religious houses all but useless for religious as for other purposes. The masses, who at first loved the friars, and with good reason, now hated them. The monks of the old orders were regarded with good humour, but without respect. There was a good deal of easy hospitality and almsgiving. A sufficient proof of their charity is that the dissolution of the abbeys in England created the necessity for a Poor Law. The vexed question of the moral condition of the monasteries is impossible to answer decisively. At the time it was described as unspeakably bad by the enemies of the monks, seeking a pretext for their spoliation. It is rather the fashion now to represent the monasteries as patterns of virtuous and godly living, and to refer all evil reports to the malice and falsehood of Thomas Cromwell and his

commissioners.* I fancy the truth will be fo between these two extremes. It was a dissolute coarse age. I daresay the monks were no worse than the rest of the world, but I doubt if they were much better. Cotemporary literature, chronicles, history, satire, and last, not least, public opinion, all point to a low condition of morals amongst the so-called "religious." I cannot bring myself to believe that it was quite a delusion. On the other hand, I have no scandalous stories to tell, not because they are scarce, but because I see no good in repeating them. It would surely give special pain to those whose belief in the existence of these scandals makes the very idea of monasticism hateful to them.

When an institution has ceased to be useful or respected, we may be sure it will sooner or The Fall.

* See (*e.g.*) Gasquet's "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries."

later disappear. Monasteries were pretty certain to go, in England, even if Henry had not quarrelled with the Pope over the divorce of his wife. When a tree is rotten inside, any chance gust of wind may blow it down. So it was with the monasteries. The actual cause of their fall was so casual as to be almost an accident. But they went, because they were so ripe for destruction that almost anything was enough to produce a catastrophe. The manner of their end is soon told. England was more monastic than any other State in Europe. According to Father Gasquet's lists, there were about 8,000 "religious" persons and 850 religious houses in England, including nunneries. And here let me say that I have been obliged to exclude all mention of nunneries from this lecture, for lack of time to talk about them. It may be taken generally that all the orders (except the Carthusians, who, by the bye, required strict silence) had female communities in England. It appears from the pension lists of monks who received compensation when their monasteries were suppressed, that the houses were already more than half emptied. Whether novices did not offer, or the monks, pressed by debt, did not care to take them, I do not know, but the fact seems pretty clear. Thus Tintern, with accommodation for eighty monks, seems to have held only thirteen at the date of its surrender to Henry VIII.

Suppression.

Suppression was not an invention of Henry VIII.'s. The alien priories, 100 to 150 in number—that is, cells established by foreign abbeys on estates in England given to them by William the Norman—had enjoyed a precarious existence until Henry V., when they were finally suppressed or turned into English houses.

Again, in 1459, Bishop Waynfleet of Winchester procured the suppression of the Augustinian Priory of Selborne, then a "deserted convent," in order to found Magdalen College, Oxford. Again, in 1490, the convent of St. Rhadegund was dissolved at the instance of the Bishop of Ely, on account of "the dissolute lives of the nuns by reason of its proximity to Cambridge." Bishop Fisher (1521) of Rochester procured the suppression of Bromehall in Salisbury and Heigham in Kent, on account, as was alleged, of the "enormities, misgovernances, and slanderous living" of the nuns. Fisher used the endowments for his then new foundation of St. John's College, Cambridge. Later on, under Henry VIII. (from 1519 to 1529), Wolsey succeeded in getting bulls from Rome for the suppression of about thirty religious houses, chiefly Augustinian.

The endowments he proposed to expend on Christ Church, Oxford, but his fall prevented the completion of his magnificent scheme. Probably Henry had, by this time, formed the idea of suppressing the monasteries, simply in order to possess their property. But the breach with Rome followed, and then it became a political necessity, which so shrewd a statesman as Henry could not but perceive, that the orders, always devoted to the Pope, should be swept away. It was all done between 1535 and 1540. First by virtue of the new royal supremacy, Thomas Cromwell, the Vicegerent and Vicar-general, appointed commissioners to go throughout England, and to "visit" and inspect the religious houses, and inquire into the condition of their inmates. They reported a terrible state of moral corruption and bankruptcy. But the commissioners were worthless men, and their evidence,

which we do not possess in its original state, must be taken *cum grano*. However, it was enough for the purpose. The King made two mouthfuls of the monasteries. Those with an income of less than £200 were suppressed in 1535 by Act of Parliament (27 Henry VIII. ch. 28). In 1539 another Act (31 Henry VIII. ch. 13) was passed vesting in the King the estates of such of the larger abbeys as should be surrendered. Within a few months "voluntary" surrenders were procured from nearly all the abbeys. The few abbots who stood out were opportunely found to have committed treason. They were hanged, and their abbeys were confiscated. Thus, for better or for worse, religious houses vanished from English soil. If they had sinned, they sinned no more. Hundreds of shrines were laid desolate, and the incense of prayer and worship, which for centuries had been offered unceasingly to God, went up no more.

The Spoil.

According to Father Gasquet's summary, the amount received by the King was: for lands, buildings, and furniture, £1,338,442. 9*s*. 2½*d*., and for jewels, £79,081. 16*s*. 4½*d*.—total, £1,417,524. 5*s*. 7*d*., or about £14,000,000 of present money.* But this by no means represents the intrinsic value of the monastic estates, because the land was usually granted to courtiers and others at a price very far below the value. The money spent in pensions to the disendowed monks and nuns amounted to £33,045. 5*s*. 8½*d*.

Dr. Littledale on the Suppression.

Dr. Littledale, an authority not friendly to Henry VIII., thus sums up the case:

"There can be no doubt that the religious houses, viewed simply as corporate estates, had been very badly managed for a considerable time, were heavily encumbered, and a weight

* "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries," vol. ii. Appendix iii.

round the neck of financial progress in England; and that as spiritual agencies they had mainly outlived their usefulness, so that, lamentable as were the circumstances of their destruction and scandalous as was the waste of property seized, there is little reason to suppose that any practical benefit would have followed from their continuance, whatever might have been the advantages of reform, or even of transfer to other purposes on the principle of *cy près*." *

Monastic History presents difficulty.

The story of the monks is a wonderful tale. But when one stops to think over it and asks oneself what it all means—this high ideal, appreciated and applauded by the general consent of mankind, yet constantly, miserably, fatally breaking down in practice, until the world, disgusted and disappointed, turns away with shrinking and scorn—it seems to me it is a

* "Encyclopædia Britannica," Art. "Monachism."

story of no common difficulty to understand and explain.

Motive force of Monasticism.

What was the motive force which lay at the bottom of monasticism? It was a deep conviction of the vanity of the world, and a desire to give up all for Christ's sake It was a real and honest effort to take up the Cross and follow Christ, in the most absolute and thoroughgoing manner possible. The earlier monasticism was no doubt to a large extent self-absorbed. The monk was intent on saving himself without much regard to others. The separate life was adopted for the sake of the individual. Prayer was the great occupation, even, as we must think, to the prejudice of duty. But too much praying is not a common fault, and, after all, there was no great sin in an intensely realistic age taking literally the apostolic command "Pray without ceasing."

Monasticism for strong men.

But even at the beginning, few Western monks devoted themselves exclusively to meditation, and in the later orders, especially the mendicant, the main object became the good of others rather than the spiritual elevation of self. If I may quote the words of Montalembert:* "Monasteries were never intended to collect the invalids of the world. It was not sick souls, but, on the contrary, the most vigorous and healthful which the human race has ever produced, who presented themselves in crowds to fill them. The religious life, far from being the refuge of the feeble, was, on the contrary, the arena of the strong. . . . The distinctive characteristic which shines from all the series of great monastic creations and existences, and which I desire to exhibit before my readers, is strength; not that strength which man has in

* "Monks of the West," i. 25.

common with animals; not that material strength which demoralises the world with its contemptible triumphs; not that external strength, the dangerous help of which is invoked too often by blind and cowardly Christians; not that strength which consists in imposing on others one's own convictions or interests; but that strength which signifies the discipline of self, the power of ruling, of restraining, of subduing rebellious nature, that strength which is a cardinal virtue and which overcomes the world by courage and sacrifice."

Services of the Monks.

Look again at the services of the monks. Well may an eminent Protestant writer ask:* "How could the middle ages have done without them?" In the terrible time of violence, ignorance, and confusion which saw the break-up of the Empire of the West, the monasteries

* Trench's "Medieval Church History," p. 102.

kept alive the idea of law and order, provided a refuge from murder and rapine, and actually steadied European society by telling men to look away from this world to the next. Since St. Augustine had predicted the approaching end of the world, the belief had been growing, and now, supported as it seemed by the actual presence of "great tribulation," and "men's hearts failing for fear," it had taken firm hold of the popular imagination. The Church no less than the world despaired of the temporal future, but the difference was that the Church, through the monks, roused men with the cry that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Again, for centuries it was the monasteries that kept learning alive, prevented the disappearance of literature, guarded and transcribed manuscripts, encouraged arts and sciences, and in fact made a home for civilisation when it was

cast out of Europe. But for the monks the old civilisation of the West might have perished as completely as that of Asia Minor.

Farming.

By making farming a part of their regular work, like prayer and the reading of Scripture, the monks conferred an immense blessing on Europe. For they raised agriculture from contempt, as only fit for slaves to do, and made it an honourable work for free men. Unless this had been done, the world, which would have struggled on without literature and art, might easily have lacked bread in times when, instead of tilling the earth, men were rather intent on trampling it with their armies, and drenching it with human blood. The monks taught men the dignity of labour. Again, where has nobler work been done than by St. Bernard's preaching, or by St. Francis and his immediate followers in tending the sick and outcasts of the

great cities, and winning them back to the love of God and their neighbours? A man must be very ignorant or very prejudiced who would deny to the Orders the credit of many great achievements and the glory of eminent service to the Church of Christ. They not only did good work, but work which emphatically had to be done, and which we must believe Providence intended *them* to do for mankind.

Failure.

That is one side of the story. The other is very different. What have we seen but one monotonous tale of decay and corruption, following hard on the heels of the noblest devotion and the most absolute purity of aim? Did Benedict lay down a rule of consecrated life?—before long a second Benedict was at work vainly trying to restore decent morality to the monasteries. Did the early Cluniacs

raise once more the standard of monastic holiness and cleanse the Papacy from inconceivable pollution?—all too soon, Cluniacs themselves, proudly shaking off episcopal discipline, were in sore need of reformation. Did Bernard make the almost forgotten Gospel ring through Christendom?—before long his Cistercians were absorbed in building the stately abbeys which he had so sternly condemned, to the utter neglect of spiritual religion. Did St. Francis, burning with human pity and heavenly zeal, become a pauper in order to preach Christ to the poor, while as the "Friend of Christ" he bound up their sores?—in one short generation the Friars had become the scandal and scorn of society—greedy, idle beggars. Did St. Dominic seek to revive the science of Theology?—within a little his Dominicans, *Domini canes*,

were busy hounding the servants of Christ to death, and, in the hope of extirpating heresy, were perfecting and practising the system of cruelty which we call the Inquisition. Thus, from first to last, again and again, there is the painful monotony of great aims and high ideals ever sinking and subsiding in failure and sin, the goodwill towards men producing, surely and speedily, deserved dislike and cynical contempt.

A Great Anomaly.

We are face to face with a great anomaly, a great paradox. How are we Christians to explain it? That the efforts of men so penetrated with the love of God, so absorbed in the desire to follow Christ, to live for Christ, and to die for Christ, to give up all for Him, should have, not occasionally but always and inevitably, so tragic an ending seems scarcely credible. Cannot God save the plans as well as the persons of his

servants? Should we not have expected that Almighty Providence would have shaped such holy beginnings to a better end? There is one way out of the difficulty which has been popular for centuries, ever since, and perhaps before, Chaucer connected the most ribald of the Canterbury Tales with a friar.

The Monk—a Joke.

We may laugh over it. The heir of St. Bernard and St. Francis is the big-bellied monk with his debauched face and shaven crown, whose very aspect has been held an excellent and traditional joke. If I have at all carried you along with me in our history, I think you will agree with me that the jest is a mighty poor one. The saddest part of the comparison is that there is some ground for it. We may well blush for the sins and weep over the failures of the monks, but surely when we remember that they started with the giving-up

of all for Christ's sake, when we look at the meagre phantom of service which our nineteenth-century Christianity calls sacrifice, and when we remember that we and they are bound together by the ties of a common allegiance and one creed, we can neither regard the character of the monks as something external to us, with which we have no concern, nor can we afford to be flippant in their condemnation. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." If they aimed very high only to fall very low, may not modern Christendom reflect that it has saved itself from so startling a contrast, rather by the poverty of its aims than by any splendour of its achievements?

Defect somewhere.

But what is the explanation of the failure of monasticism? There must be something wrong, radically wrong, in a system which with so much in its favour is dogged by such constant

disappointment. I know this is an inference to be drawn cautiously, for it may be said the Church of Christ itself has had a chequered history in which failure and falls and discouragement have been far more of the rule than the exception.* Yet it is not unreasonable to say when you find machinery constantly breaking down at the same point, that there must be some defect in the conception of it. That is the rational view of the matter, and, although enthusiasm is sometimes very useful, we cannot afford to move a step except in the light of the most vaunted, but least cultivated, of human endowments—common sense.†

* Dean Church's "Christian Church," Oxford House Papers, No. xvii.

† A friend writes:—"You will be amused to hear that candidates for canonisation have to establish their possession of the three theological and the four cardinal virtues each in an 'heroic' degree. They all get on swimmingly till they reach 'Prudence,' when the devil's advocate bowls them over by the hundred."

Gnostic tendency.

The Eastern origin of monasticism naturally and inevitably influenced its principles. I need not remind you of the fierce battle which the Christian Church almost in its infancy had to wage with Gnostic error. The Gnostic notion of antagonism in nature, and even in Heaven itself, between matter and spirit, penetrated, to a greater or less extent, all the thought of the time, both in the Church and in the world. The austerities of the Eastern monks, repulsive and cruel as they often seem, have their explanation here. The body was an enemy to be crushed, and they thought by tormenting the flesh to elevate the intellect and purify the spirit. The same idea, in a somewhat mitigated form, was bound up with the whole conception of Western monasticism. The body with its appetites must be punished. Nature must be baulked. A natural life in which the social instincts of man

have reasonable satisfaction was presented, not perhaps as something wrong, but certainly as a state vastly inferior to the artificial life of constant rebellion against nature which the cloister fostered. Men were taught that there was a higher life possible for men than that which the Creator inaugurated in Eden. A new ideal was preached. It was a very different thing from mere self-sacrifice, from the use of the world without its abuse, which was taught. Holy men formed a lofty conception of human life divorced once for all from the entanglements and cares of the world, and devoted wholly to the worship and service of God. This conception was recommended to mankind by its realisation, with no small measure of success, in the lives of saints who acted as patterns and advocates of the system. Immediately *the* religious life, as it was called, was raised on to a

pinnacle far above the family life, which, by the side of the ascetic ideal, looked poor and carnal and self-pleasing. But remember, and let us say it with all simplicity, God made the family, while man made the monk. Thus monasticism was first a rebellion, well meant, but none the less a rebellion, against God's ordinances for the government of his creatures; and, secondly, it was an exaltation of the human device above God's plan, as something holier and purer and nobler.

Solution of the Mystery.

Can you wonder now at failure? Is not the mystery explained? The good of monasticism has been accepted, for it has enshrined the life-long service of thousands of holy men. The system has failed, because it has been in arrogant competition with the laws of God. Some explanation is a matter of first-rate importance for two reasons. As

Christian men our faith must be tried, and we cannot feel easy until we have found a solution which shall be consistent with our Father's never-failing care over His children; and secondly, it nearly concerns burning questions in our own day. For human nature is ever the same. The laws of nature are still the laws of God, and if we try to set them aside in favour of our own ideals, we are no wiser than our forefathers. If we will not learn by their example, we cannot hope to escape the tragedy of their fall.